

Testimony of
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Review of the Research, Extension and Education Title of the Farm Bill
House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and
Research
1300 Longworth House Office Building.
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, on behalf of Dr. Clinton Bristow, President of Alcorn State University and Chair, Council of 1890 Presidents and Chancellors, and the entire 1890 Land-Grant Community, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Bobby R. Phills, Dean and Director for Land-Grant Programs, College of Engineering Sciences, Technology and Agriculture at Florida A&M University. I serve as Chair of the 1890 Legislative Committee.

I would like to begin by associating myself with the testimony and remarks of my colleague, Dr. Sam Curl, who represents the Board on Agriculture of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). The 1890s are members of the Board on Agriculture and we have played an active role in the development of the Board's policy recommendations. We endorse Dr. Curl's statements regarding funding needs and the need to better integrate science and education programs into all of the action and policy activities of the Department. We also recognize the importance of our international Land-Grant programs in research, academics and extension and urge continued support for these programs as they help to maintain the competitiveness of American agriculture. Building on Dr. Curl's testimony, I will focus on some additional issues of concern specific to the 1890s in the new Farm Bill rewrite legislation.

Key Issues for the 1890s

There are three key issues that I would like to address:

1. The critical need for increased investments;
2. Equitable access; and
3. Appropriate funding mechanisms.

The Critical Need for Increased Investments

I am heartened by the recent calls to double the investment in agricultural research, extension and education. It is remarkable that so many diverse interests are coming together with an understanding of an urgent need to reinvest in the science and education base serving our farmers and our communities. The 1890 universities look forward to working with all of the farm and interest groups who are working to enhance our abilities to serve their needs. As we support critically needed investments in agricultural research, extension and teaching, it is essential that the specific funding needs facing the 1890 community also be addressed. At this time, I would like to convey some of our specific recommendations to meet the unique needs of the 1890s and the communities that we serve.

Establish an 1890 Land-Grant Endowment fund

We recommend establishing an 1890 Land-Grant Endowment fund at a funding level of not less than \$20 million per year. The current legislation includes authorization for Centennial Centers; regrettably, these Centers were never funded. Since funding action was not taken on the Centennial Centers, we recommend striking this language and updating it with an endowment fund for the 1890s, modeled after the language in the 1998 Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act (AREERA) that establishes an endowment account for the Tribal Colleges.

While the 1890s are Land-Grant Universities, we did not receive funding benefits from the distribution of federal lands, as did our colleagues in the 1862s. Through the years, the 1890 universities have struggled with inadequate funding resources to meet the especially challenging needs of underserved communities. The proposed endowment account could be utilized to help address historical inequities of resources and to allow our institutions the opportunity to build our capacity to effectively compete for other funding resources. This endowment fund would be targeted to jump-start new initiatives on our campuses, particularly developing resources to support graduate and post-doctoral work by minority students.

Increase state matching requirements for 1890 formula funding

Most 1862 Land-Grant universities receive more funding from their state governments than they do from federal funding. Accordingly, 1862s usually do not have difficulties in matching federal funds with required state dollars. Unfortunately, the 1890s have not enjoyed the same level of state support in the past. In the 1998 AREERA, a fifty percent (50%) state matching requirement was established for the 1890s. We appreciate and support the determination by Congress that state funds should be available to match, at least in part, the funds provided by the federal government. Since passage of AREERA, we have made some significant headway in securing state matching funds for our programs.

We now recommend increasing the state-matching requirement to a hundred percent (100%). We request that this matching requirement be “ramped-up” over the current requirement of fifty percent (50%), with an increase of ten percent (10%) per year over the course of five years. This “ramping-up” phase will allow our universities and the states to adjust to this increased requirement over time. In addition, we ask that the Congress clarify that the state funds that are used to match federal funds should appropriately come from state research and extension funds, rather than from general education accounts.

We recognize that it will be harder for some of our 1890 universities to meet this matching requirement than others. We therefore ask that the Congress provide the Secretary of Agriculture greater flexibility in waiving an institution’s matching requirement in response to a petition from the university.

Reauthorize the 1890 Capacity Building Grant Program

The 1890 Capacity Building Grant Program has played a critical role in helping us build our capacities in research and teaching. This program has allowed us to attract new faculty, enhance

our ability to conduct quality research, and has enabled us to carry out needed curriculum development programs. Unfortunately, the authorization for this program has not included the cooperative extension arm of our Land-Grant programs. We therefore recommend expanding the eligible participants in this program to include 1890 Cooperative Extension. We also recommend that the authorized funding level for this program be increased to \$25 million per year.

Reauthorize the Socially Disadvantaged Initiative Program

We recommend reauthorizing the Socially Disadvantaged Initiative (Section 2501) Program at a level not less than \$10 million per year. This program allows the 1890 universities and other Community Based Organizations to cooperatively work directly in a sustained way with small farmers. We provide training in cash flow, farm management environmental stewardship, and alternative market development. We train small farmers to access new and alternative markets for their crops and animal commodities. This program has had a dramatic impact on increasing the economic viability and sustainability of these small and limited resource farmers. This critical program should be sustained and strengthened and other small farm programs should be established as a safety net for all such farmers in this category. Comparatively, this group of farming clientele has been vertically ignored in terms of specially targeted programs. We therefore ask the Committee to rectify this oversight by providing sufficient funding for this program to provide sustained impact.

Reauthorize the 1890 Facilities Grant Program

We recommend reauthorizing the 1890 Facilities Grant Program (Section 1447) at a funding level of \$25 million per year. The 1890s have a clear and immediate need to improve their academic, research and extension physical facilities. There is also an urgent need to adequately equip these facilities for state-of-the art equipment. Years of limited resources have taken their toll and needed improvements cannot be delayed forever. Meanwhile, new technologies require new resources and modifications to existing facilities. Without the needed improvements and technology upgrades, it becomes more and more difficult to recruit and train top quality scientists and other educational professionals for the future. We therefore urge your support of increased authorization for the 1890 Facilities Grant program.

Equitable Access

In addition to our needs for increased funding, the 1890s request assistance in gaining equitable access to existing funding sources so as to become full and active participants in the federal/state Land-Grant partnership.

Raise the funding base of 1890 formula funding

We support increased formula funding for both 1862 and 1890 institutions. The amount of formula funds available to the 1890s is smaller than the amount of these funds available to our colleagues in the 1862s. Currently, the legislation requires that the funding base of 1890 formula research funding (Section 1445) be set at an amount equivalent to not less than 15% of 1862 formula funding (Hatch funding). We recommend that this percentage be increased to an amount equivalent to not less than 25% of Hatch funding. Similarly, 1890 Extension formula funding (Section 1444) is currently set at an amount equivalent to not less than 6% of 1862 Extension formula funding (Smith–Lever funding). We recommend increasing this amount to 15% of Smith–Lever funding.

Provide access to McIntyre-Stennis (Forestry) funding

Currently, 1890 universities are not eligible for formula funds targeted to forestry issues (McIntyre-Stennis). Many of our institutions, however, abide in states where forestry is a major agricultural industry and these institutions have forestry and natural resource programs that are germane to the forestry industry and applicable to the current program eligibility guidelines. We recommend an expansion for authorized funding for McIntyre-Stennis and increasing eligible participants to include the 1890 universities.

Include West Virginia State College

We welcome the return of West Virginia State College to the ranks of Land-Grant institutions. We recognize the need of West Virginia State to retain the base funding that has reestablished them and we agree that they should be eligible to participate in those programs for which 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University are eligible. In each instance, of course, we would hope that additional resources are made available to all of the 1890 Land-Grants and Tuskegee, so that West Virginia's participation does not put an additional and unintended burden on their colleagues.

Appropriate Funding Mechanisms

We would like to commend the leadership of USDA/CSREES and the Land-Grant community in the development of the new IFAFS competitive grants program. The Department staff and others went the extra mile to make sure that our institutions were fully aware of the new program and gave us the opportunity to compete as equal partners in the process. We achieved some success, however, with enhanced support to increase our competitiveness we will do even better in the future.

While we support competitive grants, we are concerned that some mistake the term "competitive" with the term "quality." The competitive grant process does provide a form of quality control for awarding funds for relatively short-term projects. However, many of the programs that we provide need to be sustained over time. Short-term competitively awarded projects do not adequately serve the longer-term needs of the underserved populations that we work with. Formula funding and endowment funds provide the necessary sustained funding that is required to truly build capacity. There are many ways of insuring that long-term projects have adequate quality control mechanisms in place. Indeed, the "merit review process" developed in the 1998 AREERA provides the kinds of oversight and review that are necessary. Again, we support competitive grants, but it is not the only funding tool and it is not always the most effective mechanism to meet our needs.

Investing in the Future

Again, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify here today. We look forward to working with you and our colleagues in the university community as we move through the reauthorizing of the Farm Bill. We urge you to use this moment, this opportunity, to invest in our 1890 universities and in the future of our communities and the people we serve.